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Strange Bolero

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Music That Brought Madness and Oblivion

EVENING had closed in. The final rays of a somewhat faded December sun were settling their dusty hues on the massive furniture of the library. Stillness pervaded the apartment, but in the distance one could hear the din rising from the street.

The door opened and the squeakiness of a rusty hinge was barely perceptible. A tall figure entered the room and slowly approached the desk.

The bank had been in a turmoil all day. Richard Branning, president, had accomplished nothing. Only one thought had remained constant in his mind. Had James taken those bonds? Who else could have had access to that safe? Incomprehensible ideas floated through his brain. Suppose—suppose—if he had—all seemed possessed of that one thought! James, the scapegrace of the family, impossible! It was too terrible to even think about. What about Margaret and the children? No doubt Margaret would have her great “ideal” of manhood shattered beyond her most humble conception if she even suspected the misdoings of that one. Nothing did she know of his gambling and affairs with the lower crust of the city. Oh, well, he might as well do it, for he had little to live for, and

surely no one would grieve over his sacrifice—if one could call it that. Guess he'd call James and have a little talk with him; might as well get it over with; for tomorrow every one would know as the truth one thing or the other.

QUICKLY he crossed to the telephone. Before he reached it, however, the instrument uttered a piercing ring.

"Yes, this is he. Oh, James—I was just going to call you. Yes? Over here—right away."

Wandering through his spacious apartment to pass those endless minutes away, he approached his concert grand piano. People had often remarked that as a pianist he was a human being—susceptible to emotions and aware of joys and sorrows; but as a banker, he was a machine gloating with efficiency and mocking at the inadequencies of other men as if he were super-human.

Snatches of Chopin in a dreamy nocturne, fragments of a stormy ballad rose from his nimble fingers. A modernistic number of Debussy or Ireland caught his fancy. The more ponderous works of Beethoven and Bach he omitted from this rambling interlude.

The sharp ring of the bell announced the arrival of the culprit.

"**S**O GOOD of you to see me," began James falteringly; and then, rather abruptly, "I'm in a terrible mess, Richard. I took \$250,000 worth of negotiable bonds this morning to pay—er—er some debts I had accumulated, never dreaming that the money would be needed so soon. Of course, I had intended to pay it back as soon as possible."

"Yes, I knew you had. You want me to get you out of it, don't you? I will, but in a far different manner from what you imagine, and most assuredly, entirely probationary!" Richard stopped to see the effect of his well-pointed phrases on his listener.

"Yes—yes—go on. What are the conditions?" muttered James, despondently.

"That you must give up gambling and these illicit affairs of yours. Can't you realize that Margaret thinks all the world of you? That you're her ideal?"

"Ideal—hah—that's a laugh!" James flouted. Angered by Richard's implied accusations, and conscious that they smack-ed of truth, he burst out into hysterical laughter. His inane giggles re-echoed throughout the gloomy room. Suddenly he regained his composure.

"Sorry to have acted like that," he apologized. "I realize Margaret's devotion and all that—but I can't. I could be sued for hundreds of thousands of dollars—oh, I think I'd better end it all! It would at least leave Margaret and the kids thinking decently of me."

"**J**AMES, you are not going to kill yourself. Is it possible that you would disgrace yourself to such a degree? Don't you realize the selfishness of that way out? It would leave Margaret to face the gaff by herself. I always thought you were more of a man than to do that! Of course, I might be mistaken," he added cynically.

"What other way is there?" James mocked.

"Listen, James, no one but you and I know that you took those bonds, but every one in the bank suspects you; it certainly wouldn't do any harm to have them think wrong. I'll think of some way to extricate you from blame."

"Richard, you wouldn't do that—for me?" gasped James, unbelievably.

"Yes, I think it decidedly better. Only it isn't for your sake alone, but for Margaret's and the children's too!"

"But I can't let you do that—"

"Think it over for about half an hour and then give me your decision. I'll call you!"

James left the apartment silently, almost in a stupor. He managed to bundle himself into a taxi and then homeward.

Richard increased his relentless pacing—back and forth—back and forth. He stopped at the piano aimlessly. He glanced through the numbers strewn about until he came to Ravel's **BOLERO**.

The opening staccato measures were interpreted unusually well by the pianist, but to him they represented a very discordant trio such as Havoc, Chaos, and Peace. At first these terms were together and very much at peace with the world. Suddenly they were scattered by a certain vibrant melody. This taunting strain increased. Take the blame—take the blame—was being reiterated with constant rapidity and emphasis in his perturbed mind. The melody resounded in the room; each echo seemed to say, "Take the blame," in a deriding manner, until a thousand devils jeered at him in insolent fashion. The rhythmical structure of the number so permitted that a succession of single tones with a constant bass caused a fantastical impression of a tom-tom or other resonant instruments as employed by the Orientals in their sacred ceremonials.

OF course, there would be many people suspecting the truth.

But let them doubt the stability of his cause for finishing in his own characteristic way, thought Richard. How would Margaret react to his death? How would the children? It would be decidedly better for the children if they thought that they had a disgraced and dishonest uncle rather than that kind of a father.

Ah, the harmony was distinctly minor now. The turbulent spirits within him subsided. The bombastic style seemed to have completely escaped his power.

Suddenly the full magnificent air augmented from a series of tumultuous variegated keys into the original one. The staccato echo of the bass rose to a grandeur unknown. The leers of the devils and thoughts of the horrors again mounted in his mind. Havoc, Chaos, and Peace seemed to be together again, each trying to outdo the others. The number was over with a sickening crash! Chaos had won!

RICHARD proceeded as in a daze to the telephone and quickly dialed a familiar number.

"May I speak to James? Tell him it's Richard." A husky quiver was noticeable.

"We were just going to call you, sir," came the emotionless reply. "Mr. James killed himself a few minutes ago! He left a full confession, witnessed, about some embezzling he had done. Mr. Richard—"

The only answer he received was a dull thud and the clatter of a telephone and its stand.



A La Edgar Guest

By Betty Gaylord

Life, my dear, is what you make it!
You have to grin,
Stick out your chin,
And take it!



Dollar in the Crannied Pocketbook

(Poor Tennyson!!)

By Betty Gaylord

Dollar in my pocketbook,
I pluck you out of the bottom,
I hold you here, eagle and all, in my hand,
Little dollar—but if I could understand
What you are, eagle and all, and all in all,
I would better understand economics.